Reconsidering the effects of group status and societal threat on political support

Guy Elcheroth, University of St Andrews
[Panel] 4A Personality, Authority, and Politics
[Section] Electoral Behavior, Participation and Public Opinion

When and why do people trust and support institutions, groups or individuals that exert power over them? An increasingly prominent set of answers to this question has been developed within the perspective of system justification theory (SJT). A core assumption underlying this theoretical approach is that people are intrinsically motivated to justify and rationalize existing social or political arrangements, even if these arrangements contradict their personal or collective interests. Two hypotheses that have been formulated in this theoretical perspective will be critically examined: (1) the disadvantaged would (sometimes) be even more motivated to support existing authorities than the privileged, and (2) conservative motives would (generally) be exacerbated under societal conditions of system threat. To underpin this conceptual reconsideration, outcomes from multilevel analyses of the first two waves of the European Social Survey will be presented. They reveal a strong negative relationship between national social exclusion rates and political support, as well as cross-level interactions between social exclusion rates and group status on political support. Contrary to a SJT perspective, these findings suggest that when a fundamental social and moral order is threatened, i.e. when generalised vulnerability becomes a collective experience, politically relevant social representations are reframed and overall support to authorities is likely to diminish. Further, members of privileged groups appear to express stronger support to authorities than the disadvantaged as long as system instability is unlikely, but the relationship between group status and political support becomes more negative with increasing vulnerability of the system to moral contestation and change.

Reducing discrimination by blurring intergroup boundaries

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[Panel] 2S Power, dominance and intergroup conflict: Psychological, political and cultural perspectives
[Section] Intergroup Relations

Social classification, the psychological division into "us" and "them" is a significant contributor to prejudice and intergroup discrimination, whether this be the persistent negative stereotypes held of minority groups or violent intergroup conflict. Correspondingly, social psychologists have focused on reducing the extent of this differentiation in efforts to improve intergroup relations. A great deal of work has now supported the idea that blurring intergroup boundaries, for example, reclassifying one,s own group and other groups into a superordinate category, can have beneficial effects for intergroup relations. Under some conditions, however, this approach to improving attitudes can have unintended negative consequences, prompting even greater bias between groups. In this paper I discuss research that has identified underlying motivations related to inclusion, belonging and uniqueness as determinants of negative reactions to reclassification, and the solutions offered in the form of intervention strategies that simultaneously address fundamental psychological needs, while at the same time optimizing conditions conducive to harmonious intergroup relations.

Reflective Structures of the Participants' Discourse during Mass Political Actions (Poster)

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[Panel] 4P Poster Session: Electoral Behavior, Participation and Public Opinion
[Section] Electoral Behavior, Participation and Public Opinion

Research of the creative personification from protest mass was conducted with Reflective Interview, which previously used in organisation psychology at the organisation culture development domain. This investigation started in the style of the psychological documentation with its main purpose to fix emotional, intellectual, personal and inter-group components of participants' consciousness. A method of video (audio) interview was applied. The matter of the investigation were participants of mass events from 22.11.04 — 16.01.05 (in Kyiv and Donetsk). The subject was the participants' personal reflection of the event which named Orange Revolution. The re-spondents were taken out of the "Maydan" context through a suggestion to participate in a public self-investigation. A semantic background of the interview structure were the following questions: In the present events context, what NEW appeared in Your knowledge, experience, relationships, feelings? If you could be plunged in thoughts and feelings of the opposite camp representatives (blue / orange)? What do they think about you, what do you want to tell them as to people? The Investigation was held both in the camp of "power" (n=54 in Kyiv, +72 in Donetsk) and in the opposition camp (n=254). The content analysis of participants' reflection demonstrates the mechanism of the creative personification from protest mass. Reflective structure in the participants' discourse was distinguished by special linguistic frequency analysis. No difference of intellectual reflection was found for participant of different political camp. The causal reflective structures are most frequent. The difference in personal reflective structures (collective ore individual identification) was significant.